The Thirty Years' Wars 1618-1648

**The Origins of the Conflict**

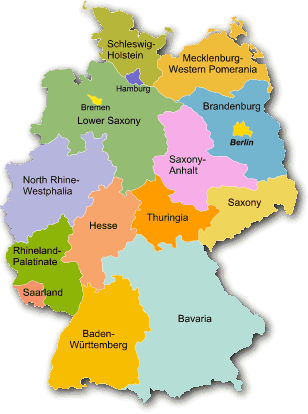
Since the proclamation of a reformed church by Martin Luther, the problems of two religious creeds coexisting in a single state had consumed the resources of the German princes, prelates, and imperial cities of the Holy Roman Empire which was a union of territories in Central Europe during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period under a Holy Roman Emperor. The Empire's territorial extent varied over its history, but at its peak it encompassed the Kingdom of Germany, the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Burgundy; for much of its history the Empire consisted of hundreds of smaller sub-units, principalities, duchies, counties, Free Imperial Cities, as well as other domains. The Holy Roman Empire was not a highly centralized state like most countries today. Instead, it was divided into dozens — eventually hundreds — of individual entities governed by kings, dukes, counts, bishops, abbots or other rulers, collectively known as princes. There were also some areas ruled directly by the Emperor. At no time could the Emperor simply issue decrees and govern autonomously over the Empire. His power was severely restricted by the various local leaders.

From the High Middle Ages onwards, the Holy Roman Empire was marked by an uneasy coexistence of the princes of the local territories who were struggling to take power away from it. To a greater extent than in other medieval kingdoms such as France and England, the Emperors were unable to gain much control over the lands that they formally owned. Instead, to secure their own position from the threat of being deposed, Emperors were forced to grant more and more autonomy to local rulers, both nobles and bishops. This process began in the 11th century with the Investiture Controversy and was more or less concluded with the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. Several Emperors attempted to reverse this steady dissemination of their authority, but were thwarted both by the papacy and by the princes of the Empire

The Peace of Augsburg of 1555 had brought a temporary truce in the religious conflict in the German states. This settlement had recognized only Lutherans and Roman Catholics, but Calvinism had subsequently made gains in a number of states. The Calvinists began to demand recognition of their rights. The Thirty Years' War began, however, as a direct result of a conflict in the Hapsburg-ruled Kingdom of Bohemia.

From 1616 to 1748, the Rhine Valley was a continuous scene of bloodshed and enormous property damage from a series of wars including; the [Thirty Years War](http://www.cob-net.org/text/history_30yearwar.htm), the French Wars, and the Wars of Frederick the Great. Each conflict progressively weakened the fabric of social enterprise. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) ended the Thirty Years War, but allowed the big three state churches, Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed to become a new monolithic force of domination and persecution. These prolonged conflicts left Germany in a quilted patchwork of local districts, knitted together by varying political relationships between the numerous governing princes. The new Big Three ecclesiastical bodies (Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed) forthrightly denied all other religious groups the right to exist within the Empire, and the citizens of each local district were forced to join whichever church was recognized by the local nobility, an administrative carry-over from the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. It is not over-simplification to frame the position of the Big Three churches to all other groups as: "Convert, leave, or die."

Although this tri-lateral body was united against other groups, each were still ardent enemies of one another; thus proving the adage: '*The enemy of my enemy is my friend*.' Since wars changed political control in some districts frequently, it was entirely possible to be Lutheran one year, Reformed the next year, and perhaps even Catholic the next. People had become weary of political wars and church-state persecution. Repeated invasions had left the commoner with no real sense of identity or stability. Because armies subsisted on what they could take from local citizenry, it mattered very little to the populace whether the soldier was friend or foe. At the end of the century, while the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I was defending Vienna from the Ottoman Turks in the east, French king Louis XIV grasped this opportunity to invade the Palatinate district in the west. Known as the War of the Grand Alliance (1688-97), this war and the later War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14) again devastated central Germany, especially the Palatinate. Economic burdens on local nobility were immense. Farm lands were not replanted due to constant invasion, and people were often forced into thievery and immorality in order to survive. The future appeared to offer no hope or relief, only despair and gloom. But then something new happened which took the Big Three by surprise. On the soil of bloodshed and inter-faith disunity, another religious movement sprung forth. Pietism would also became the next receptor of state imprisonment and execution. It was a logical outgrowth of a religious populace that was exhausted of both war and the insensitivity of church leadership; a clergy that physically enforced attendance at worship and obeisance before dignitaries. Because worship had become dull and insensitive (more of a political tool) people naturally turned inwardly for spiritual renewal. Originally content to remain as a sub-group within the Big Three state churches, Pietists endeavored to substitute devotional formalism with a more genuine intellectual and emotional experience. Adherents stressed that faith, regeneration, and sanctification were qualities to be experienced rather than being explained by a church official. Local governments, overwhelmed with administrative disruptions and economic recovery from war, took little notice of Pietism in its earliest form. However, when the Separatists evolved, that would all change, for this new sub-group desired to clearly take the movement outside of the Big Three, and possibly exist as free independent groups without denominational structure.



**The Peace of Westphalia (1648)**

The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 ended the Thirty Years' War. Sweden acquired western Pomerania, Eastern Pomerania was assigned to Brandenburg. France annexed part of Alsace and some nearby territory.

The settlement formally recognized the independence of the Dutch Republic and Switzerland and granted the German states the right to make treaties and alliances, thereby further weakening the authority of the Holy Roman emperor.

In religious affairs, the Peace of Westphalia expanded the Peace of Augsburg to include Calvinists, as well as Catholics and Lutherans.

The Peace of Westphalia ended the Holy Roman emperor's hope of restoring both his own power and the Catholic faith throughout the empire. The empire was now fragmented into a number of virtually independent states.

**The end of the Thirty Years' War left Hapsburg Spain isolated.**

The French war against Spain continued until 1659, when the Treaty of the Pyrenees awarded France part of the Spanish Netherlands and some territory in northern Spain. King Philip IV of Spain agreed to the marriage of his daughter Maria Theresa to King Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715) of France.

Together, the Peace of Westphalia and the Treaty of the Pyrenees established France as the predominant power on the European continent.